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INTRODUCTION

Background

Eliminating Barriers for Learning is a packaged continuing education program for secondary school teachers and staff that focuses on mental health issues in the classroom. Its overall aim is to help eliminate barriers to learning by understanding and addressing mental health issues in the school environment. Developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, it offers information on adolescent social-emotional wellness and provides specific skill-based techniques for classroom use. It aims to—

- Increase knowledge of adolescent mental health, including risks and protective factors;
- Show teachers and staff how to develop strategies to help students who need additional support;
- Suggest ways to promote a mentally healthy learning environment through instructional techniques that take into account individual styles of learning and classroom climate; and
- Help teachers and staff identify school and community resources and partnerships to promote youth mental health.

Serious emotional disturbances affect 5-9 percent of American children and adolescents each year.¹ That means, on average, that one or more students in every high school classroom could be affected.

Obviously, the impact of children's mental health on schools—teachers, classrooms, students, and staff—can be significant. However, the impact of school practices that promote mental health can also make a difference. This set of materials can help teachers and staff make a difference in the lives of their students and in the learning climate of their classrooms.

¹Farmer, E.M.Z., et al. The Epidemiology of Mental Health Programs and Service Use in Youth: Results From the Great Smoky Mountains Study. In M.H. Epstein et al. (eds.) *Outcomes for Children and Youth With Behavioral and Emotional Disorders and Their Families*. 2nd edit. (2003)

About the Training Package

This training manual consists of four modules which can be delivered together or at different times. Each one contains:

- A trainer's outline, with instructions for each step of the training;
- Trainer preparation notes with background information and, where necessary, more detailed instructions for specific activities or discussions;
- Slides, in a PowerPoint presentation (hard copies of the slides can be reproduced as overhead transparencies); and
- Reproducible handouts for participants.

Because they are designed to stand alone, the modules contain some repetitions. For example, the definition of serious emotional disturbances is given twice. Trainers can tailor modules according to their own time tables. Like most forms of in service education and professional development training, Eliminating Barriers for Learning emphasizes knowledge and skill development.

Module I: Eliminating Barriers for Learning: The Foundation

This module describes the links between teen social-emotional development, mental health, and learning. It also addresses the impact of the stigma and discrimination that surround mental health issues and explores the teacher's role in helping students with mental health needs. It lays the foundation for, and is a prerequisite for, the three modules that follow.

Module II: Social-Emotional Development, Mental Health, and Learning

This module gives an overview of common mental health issues among adolescents and their potential effects on learning and behavior. It provides information on risk factors and protective factors for mental health and emotional problems, and signs indicating when teens may need help.

Module III: Making Help Accessible to Students and Families

This module provides practice in formulating a plan to help students with mental health needs. It encourages the creation of sustained school-home-community partnerships to meet the educational and developmental needs of these adolescents.

Module IV: Strategies To Promote a Positive Classroom Climate

This module addresses strategies to create an accepting classroom climate that promotes learning for all students, including those with mental health needs.

Delivering the Training

The training includes a variety of learning activities, including large group discussions, individual work with handouts, and small group brainstorming sessions.

Here are some key points to consider when planning the sessions:

Audience. The training is designed primarily for secondary school teachers. However, other school staff members who interact with students could benefit from the training as well.

Trainers. Trainers should know the school in which the training is given, especially the resources available for teens with mental health needs. The modules are designed for delivery by a member of the pupil services staff (a school psychologist, social worker, guidance counselor, or nurse, for example). Co-training with others such as a mental health professional (Module II) and a teacher (Module IV) is recommended.

Trainer preparation. Trainer preparation notes in each module provide background information on the topics presented, as well as detailed instructions for directing activities and facilitating discussions when needed. Trainers can prepare for the sessions by reading the trainer outline and notes with the slides and handouts alongside. Add notes about personal anecdotes or ideas for discussion in the margins.

Part of preparation is tailoring each module to the policies and practices of specific school buildings and districts. For example, a school's policy regarding teacher contact with parents can be woven into the development of an action plan (Module III). Or a State initiative on emotional and behavioral problems and schools can be discussed when introducing the links between mental health and learning (Module I).

A third preparatory step is to recruit guest trainers for help with specific areas. It is strongly recommended that an experienced teacher help deliver Module IV, which focuses on classroom strategies. Module II, which gives an overview of teen mental health issues, offers opportunities for a guest trainer who has first-hand experience with mental or emotional problems in adolescence.

Module III could be delivered with a school or community social worker.

A fourth step is to prepare participant materials. Each participant should have:

- Agenda for the session
- Photocopies of the slides and handouts

See the Trainer Preparation Checklist on page iv for more detailed instructions.

Length of training. The entire training package should take about 4 hours to deliver. However, each of the modules has been designed to stand alone, with the exception of Module I, which is a prerequisite for all or any of the following modules. This flexible format allows for training in specific areas or for ongoing training as time permits.

Training equipment. Equipment needed is an easel or chalkboard and a projector for overhead transparencies or PowerPoint slides.

TRAINER PREPARATION CHECKLIST

At least 4 weeks in advance of training:

- ☐ Consider recruiting others to help train certain modules. These specialists can help lead the activities and discussions, contributing their own expertise as they interact with the participants.
 - Module II: A school psychologist or other mental health professional who is familiar with the impact of mental health problems on learning; also a youth or family member who can speak from personal experience about the impact of a mental health problem on learning.
 - Module III: A school or community social worker who is familiar with local and district resources.
 - Module IV: A teacher with experience or a special interest in mental health issues who can speak from experience about classroom strategies and their influence on mental health.
- ☐ Set date, time, and place.
- ☐ Recruit participants. Place poster (Mental Health: It's Part of Our Classrooms) in a prominent spot in teacher's lounge or other place where teachers congregate. In the white space at the bottom of the poster, add information about time and place; include contact information.

At least 2 weeks in advance of training:

- ☐ Begin study of trainer outlines and preparation notes, including a preview of slides and handouts.
- ☐ Prepare participant materials:
 - Photocopy handouts for each module.
 - Photocopy slides (optional).
 - Prepare participant agendas, using the trainer outline as a guide; allow for breaks!
 - Make overhead transparencies if a laptop and projector are not available for PowerPoint slides.
- ☐ Arrange for equipment. You will need:
 - A laptop and projector for PowerPoint slides or an overhead projector.
 - Flipchart (easel and newsprint) and markers or chalkboard and chalk.

Two days before the training:

- ☐ Confirm room and equipment availability; test the equipment.
- ☐ Confirm that participant materials are ready.
- ☐ Confirm any arrangements for refreshments.

